

February 22, 2023

Dear Senator Saud Anwar (Co-Chair), Representative McCarthy Vahey (Co-Chair) and Members of the Public Health Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is DeVaughn Ward and I am a licensed attorney in Connecticut. In solidarity with the Regulate DOC Healthcare CT Coalition, **I stand in support of SB957 AN ACT CONCERNING THE OVERSIGHT OF HEALTH CARE IN CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS BY THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH.** Connecticut is currently the only state where the Department of Corrections oversees and operates its own healthcare system. Last year, the Public Health Committee set forth actions to address these issues with SB 448 which became PA 22-133. Our request is that the Public Health Committee steps forward as courageously as it did last year and implements regulation and oversight of the Department of Correction's healthcare system.

Over the past 5 years, Atty. Kenneth Krayske and I have represented Connecticut inmates and recovered millions in litigation against the state of Connecticut Department of Correction ("CT DOC"). Poor health is quite expensive. However, there is a deeper cost to families and communities of returning citizens. One of the cases I'm currently litigating is the death of Desiree Diaz, a 32-year-old Groton resident, that died from alcohol withdrawal symptoms within 24 hours of being placed in York Correctional despite a medical and detox watch being ordered by the Court upon arrival. Her two sons have forever lost their mother due to negligent health conditions. Previously, I represented Karon Nealy, a 19-year-old Waterbury resident that died from lupus complications while housed at Manson Youth Institute. His daughter has forever lost her father.

SB 957 would establish a regulatory and oversight board for CT DOC. This would allow grievances and issues to be resolved in a timelier fashion and hopefully slow some of the litigation that has created a significant cost to taxpayers. Regardless of whether you have a loved one in the care and custody of DOC, bad health care outcomes in state correctional facilities are a cost that all taxpayers ultimately bare.

Finally, I'd like to note that the recent report on DOC staffing mandated by Public Act 22-133 shows that DOC continues to have severe staffing shortfalls. In addition to this measure, I also urge those of you that may also serve on Appropriations to ensure that funding to DOC medical care is accompanied with this measure.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,
DeVaughn L. Ward, Esq.